

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Illiana University Northwest

Project Details		
Title	Implementation of the new General Education Program - Assessment of Learning Outcomes	Status REVIEWED
Category	-Helping Students Learn	Updated 09-09-2010
Timeline		Reviewed 09-09-2010
Planned Project Kick off	08-01-2010	Created 03-30-2010
Target Completion	06-30-2014	Version 1

1: Project Goal

A: Previous action projects, general education reform and centralization of outcome assessment, have now brought us to implementation of our revised General Education program and concurrently systematically assessing student achievement of learning outcomes. Now that our assessment infrastructure has been established, we will focus on assessment to both inform our efforts at promoting student success and as a mechanism for evaluation of the new curriculum. This effort will involve close coordination between the faculty General Education Committee, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the majors and students of the College.

2: Reasons For Project

A: General Education reform has taken about 4 years of concerted effort on campus. At the same time, we have been working hard to embed centralized assessment of student learning outcomes into the culture and infrastructure of the campus. Our new General Education program will be implemented beginning in the fall 2010 for 2014 graduates. At the same time, the campus is focusing heavily on student retention as part of its enrollment initiative and in response to the state of Indiana's "Reaching Higher" initiative. Therefore, it is imperative that now, as we begin full-scale implementation of our new general education program that we make assessment of learning outcomes an integral part of that implementation. It is critical that we treat assessment of learning outcomes as a part of implementation of the new general education program at this opportune time so that assessment doesn't become an "add on." Also, there are bound to be unexpected difficulties or consequences of the new program and it is imperative that we collect, analyze and use data to fine tune the curriculum in an ongoing basis. Finally, a coherent program of assessment will require significant coordination between the College of Arts and Sciences and the majors and students of the college. Developing this work as an action project has proven a successful way for IU Northwest to focus its efforts and maintain active discussion of the work.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: All academic units, the Faculty Organization General Education and Assessment Committee, and the Office of Academic Affairs will be affected.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Assessment of student learning outcomes—we will be focusing on assessment as providing measures of both student success and program evaluation.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: Implementation of the general education program will take a full 4 years. By the end of this project, we will have refined our assessment infrastructure, gone through one complete admission cycle (for traditional students), and will have collected data that will inform evaluation. The faculty from all academic majors have identified for

each major where assessment of general education learning outcomes will occur. Now that we have the exact mechanisms to be described and implemented.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: Success of these AP will be monitored by the Office of Academic Affairs (including the newly established Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research). Success will require 1). A standard process of evaluation of learning outcomes for foundational courses (Elementary Composition, Public Speaking, Mathematics, and a natural science with a laboratory) and using the results to suggest necessary improvements. This will be the responsibility of the General Education and Assessment Committee; 2). A method of monitoring and communicating assessment of learning outcomes in the Principle 2 Breadth of Learning courses and centralized reporting of the results. This will primarily be the responsibility of the College of Arts and Science; and 3). A method of monitoring and communicating assessment of learning outcomes in the advanced foundational courses and learning outcomes associated with Principle 3 through 5. This will primarily be the responsibility of the academic unit offering the major. The monitoring of these efforts will be centralized in Academic Affairs and reported at least annually by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: Development, implementation, and communication of: 1) an established process by which the General Education and Assessment Committee conducts its assessment work related to learning outcomes in foundational courses and uses that data for improvement; 2) an established process by which the College of Arts and Sciences manages assessment of Breadth of Learning courses, uses the data for improvement and communicates the data to the larger campus faculty; and 3) an established process by which the academic majors (units) conduct assessment work related to learning outcomes in advanced courses and in Principles 3-5, communicates the results, and uses the results for improvement.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

- A: Link to General Education Timeline for Assessment <http://www.un.edu/~genednw/timeline/index.shtml>
- Letters were sent to Dean of College of Arts and Sciences and School of Education in May of 2010 detailing courses to be assessed for General Education this year (Principle 2 Breadth of Learning) requesting plans for assessment by September 5, 2010 and final reports by April 2011. There are 28 courses listed as Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences, 58 Social and Behavioral Sciences, 272 listed as Arts and Humanities, and 27 as Cultural and Historical Studies courses within Principle 2. The General Education/Assessment committee collected enrollment data for the Academic year 2009-10 and selected the 3 most heavily enrolled courses for assessment purposes for each of the domains rather than asking that every course be assessed. Courses in computer science, geology, sociology, history, Spanish, anthropology, communication, music, biology, psychology, philosophy and education are included in the assessment list for 2010-11.
 - The General Education/Assessment Committee is set to evaluate COMM-S 2 BIOL-L 00, CHEM-C 0 this year (Principle Foundational). Public speaking is a required general education course and biology and chemistry are the most heavily enrolled scientific reasoning courses on campus. The first meeting of General Education/Assessment Committee in fall 2010 will be spent discussing possible ways to assess this course with special guests from the Department of Communication, Chemistry and Biology.
 - The General Education/Assessment Committee will also evaluate potential standardized tests available to measure critical thinking, etc. this spring.
 - Preliminary results and data analysis for Principle Foundational – writing and mathematical ability have been posted to the General Education- Assessment website.
<http://www.un.edu/~casl/results/index.shtml>

2: Institutional Involvement

- A:
- After the General Education Principles were approved by the campus and revisions made to the curriculum of every degree, both the General Education/Assessment Committee and the Office of Academic Affairs have been instrumental in maintaining general awareness of the beginning of the assessment process. Both entities have communicated extensively with the academic units, which in turn have communicated extensively with the faculty regarding these issues. Additionally, the Office of Academic Affairs has communicated with the Library, Institutional Research and other core academic support areas regarding the project.
 - The administration is sending the Chair of the General Education/Assessment Committee, the Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Institutional Effectiveness to the Assessment Institute in 2010 to gather additional information to bring back to the campus on successful assessment projects.

3: Next Steps

- A: This is a new Action Project for IU Northwest (posted in March of 2010) so our next steps are really detailed in our answer to Question 1.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

- A: General Education Assessment is a common institutional practice. While our process is not, we believe, groundbreaking, we hope it will be successful on our campus. We are still in the early stages of this project, but we are using the same process we used in creating our General Education plan. We have broad representation from the academic units in the General Education/Assessment Committee, we have support from the Office of Academic Affairs for the process and we are moving forward at a pace that is comfortable for our campus. There is a division of responsibility, with the committee focusing more significantly in the foundational general education experiences, while the academic units themselves are creating and implementing the assessment measures for the breadth of learning courses. This has increased the number of people directly involved in the process and engendered greater buy-in by the campus community.

5: Project Challenges

- A: As this is a new experience for our campus (our first campus-wide General Education Principles and Assessment Plan) we feel like we are still feeling our way through the process. The General Education/Assessment Committee as well as the Office of Academic Affairs are excited about the implementation of the plan, but the increase in workload for the academic units and individual faculty makes it not as appealing a process for all. We continue to work to support both the individual academic units and faculty working on assessment with information, work-study assistance, and moral support along with encouragement that the results they gain are not just for use in improving the general education experience for our students but within the individual disciplines as well.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

- A: Indiana University Northwest (IUN) is embarking on an Action Project that embodies the core accountability foundation and expectation of higher education. An Action Project that assesses and validates general education outcomes is a challenging and rewarding initiative that can frame future teaching and learning strategies. While this project is centered on AQIP Category One (Helping Students Learn), activities and resultant decisions-making can also impact Categories Three (Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs) and Seven (Measuring Effectiveness). Assessment results and student achievement may suggest the need for additional support services and technology to enhance learning. Data and information collected can be analyzed multiple ways to

measure the effectiveness of achieving desired general education outcomes for the cohort as well as subgroups.

The selection of fall 2010 first-time enrollees as the cohort of students entering the revised model can provide a valuable benchmark as educators adapt to the new outcomes. IUN has developed a well-planned strategy and action steps to achieve implementation, data collection, and analysis for future decision-making. Information collected from this cohort may provide insight into course and college retention issues, pre-requisites, placement scores, and other related educational concerns.

The AQIP Principles of focus, foresight, and information are evidenced in this project. The long-term focus is to improve and maximize learning of general education outcomes. The four-year timeline indicates that the institution has the foresight to recognize that the educational foundation crafted can and should impact student learning through graduation and can provide a longitudinal link at student achievement. Performance information and achievement data is integral to valid results. The decision-making inherent in planning and implementing this project can have positive ramifications for student learning for future cohorts.

Even though this Action Project is in the initial stages of implementation, the institution is making reasonable progress with its planned activities. The challenge will be to maintain the momentum toward successful implementation of the new general education outcomes. Selection of standardized tests and concomitant plans should consider multiple direct and indirect assessment measures.

The assessment plan described in this project appears to focus on course-level student achievement within the general education curriculum. Linking and integrating course assessment with program and institutional level assessment can ensure a comprehensive analysis of learning achievement during a student's academic tenure.

2: Institutional Involvement

A: IUN worked diligently to communicate the new General Education principles to academic administration and faculty and other institutional units. Faculty approval was essential to the revised general education program. Changes in curriculum and degree requirements that impacted various disciplines and instructors were enacted. The General Education/Assessment Committee as well as the Office of Academic Affairs provided leadership in relaying information regarding these changes and its corresponding impact. Services such as the library, Institutional Research, and academic support were included in communication activities. IUN plans to send representatives to the Assessment Institute in 2010. Participants can research strategies, tools, and processes for assessing general education and share their learning with IUM faculty and administration. This background can serve as a springboard for institutional dialogue. This also reflects the AQIP Principle of people and recognizes that IUN is willing to invest in its human resources through workshops, training and other resources that focus on assessment.

3: Next Steps

A: With the project kickoff date of August 2010, activities for this project are in the beginning stages of implementation. The prior years of general education reform as well as pre-planning to identify courses to be assessed based upon enrollment data and IUN degree requirements have set the stage for implementation of the new general education program and concomitant plans for this Action Project.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: IUN has established the groundwork for general education assessment through a deliberate, inclusive institutional approach. The General Education/Assessment Committee solicited representation from diverse academic units. Administration supports and promotes the goals of this project with the proposed timeline and pace to foster success and institutionalize the assessment philosophy. Even though specific aspects of this Action Project are assigned to respective workgroups, they share a common direction and recognize that individual responsibilities complement and support the global assessment initiative. Lessons learned from administrative and faculty collaboration can frame institutional efforts for future quality improvement activities.

5: Project Challenges

A: The college acknowledges that the General Education Principles and Assessment Plan is a new experience for the institution. While the process is evolving, the institution may want to map the steps they take during this journey as a roadmap for future assessment initiatives. Employing quality tools and encouraging feedback through each step ensure that improvement efforts and concerns are recognized and can enable the institution to grow its outcomes assessment efforts.

Providing encouragement, training, and tools for faculty can ease the transition to the new General Education Principles and Assessment Plan. Changing the general education assessment culture is certainly a challenging endeavor. Documentation of student learning through new assessment practices and improvement in learning are attainable rewards.